

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LA PAZ 05971 272316Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00
INRE-00 AID-05 SY-05 MCT-02 A-01 OPR-02 OC-06
CCO-00 ACDA-12 AGRE-00 HA-05 OMB-01 /091 W
-----109347 272319Z /45

O R 272245Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1858
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO J2 QHARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 5971

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BL
SUBJECT: VIOLENCE FLARES NEAR LA PAZ

1. CONFLICTING REPORTS OF VIOLENCE IN THE SEMI-TROPICAL NORTH YUNGAS, NEAR LA PAZ, BEGAN CIRCULATING DURING THE EVENING OF JULY 26. ACCORDING TO A REPORT BY THE CATHOLIC DAILY PRESENCIA, THE TROUBLE BEGAN AFTER PEASANTS IN THE CORPIPATA-COROICO AREA ERECTED ROAD-BLOCKS IN PROTEST OF "RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS." ON JULY 25, WHEN SOLDIERS WERE SENT IN TO CLEAR THE ROAD, SHOTS WERE EXCHANGED, AND THERE WERE INJURIES OR DEATHS ON BOTH SIDES. QUERIED ABOUT THE ALTERCATION, INTERIOF MINISTER FAUSTINO RICO TORO TOLD REPORTERS THAT IT STEMMED FROM A MISUNDERSTANDING ON THE PART OF THE PEASANTSABOUT COCA CROP SUBSTITUION. A MORE ALARMING VER-SION WAS PUT OUT BY THE ARMY. IN AN OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE, IT MAINTAINED THAT AN UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF SOLDIERS, TWO MEMBERS OF THE CIVIL GUARD, AND TWO CIVILIANS HAD BEEN CAPTURED AND SUBSEQUENTLY EXECUTED BY "ARMED EXTREMISTS."

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2. ANOTHER VERSION, WHICH TENDS TO CORROBORATE THE PRESENCIA REPORT, WAS OBTAINED BY HERNAN SILES' MNRI PARTY. AFTER AN ON-SCENE INVESTIGATION, THE MNRI BELIEVES THAT THE VIOLENCE GREW OUT OF A DISPUTE, EXACERBATED AT A DRINKING PARTY, BETWEEN SILES AND PEREDA SUPPORTERS IN THE TOWN OF ARAPATA, WHICH LIES MIDWAY BETWEEN CORIPATA AND COROICO. WHEN FIGHTING BROKE OUT, GOVERN-MENT TROOPS MOVED IN, AND THE SHOOTING BEGAN. ACCORDING TO THE

MNRI, FOUR SOLDIERS AND SEVEN PEASANTS WERE KILLED.

3. ANOTHER SLANT HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY THREE AMERICAN AID EMPLOYEES, WHO WERE IN THE CORIPATA-COROICO AREA ON THE DAY OF THE ALLEGED INCIDENT. WHILE DRIVING FROM COROICO TOWARD LA PAZ, THEIR VEHICLE WAS STOPPED AND TURNED BACK BY 11 ARMED PEASANTS WHO DESCRIBED THEMSELVES AS "CIVIL GUARDS." THE PEASANTS EXPLAINED THAT THE ROAD WAS BLOCKED BECAUSE THERE HAD BEEN A SKIRMISH BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND GOVERNMENT TROOPS ON THE PREVIOUS AFTERNOON, I.E., JULY 24. THEY SAID SEVERAL PERSONS HAD BEEN WOUNDED, BUT NONE KILLED.

4. IN THE WAKE OF THE DISTURBANCES, DAO SOURCES REPORT THAT TWO RANGER COMPANIES HAVE BEEN AIRLIFTED FROM SANTA CRUZ AND ARE CURRENTLY ON THE SCENE. IN LA PAZ, THE ATMOSPHERE IS CALM; AND, IN FACT, THE 10 PM CURFEW HAS BEEN RELAXED TO 12 MIDNIGHT.

5. COMMENT: PRECISELY WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NORTH YUNGAS IS IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE AT THIS POINT. IT SEEMS LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THE ARMY REPORT OF "ARMED EXTREMISTS" IS MISTAKEN, AND PERHAPS DELIBERATELY MISLEADING. THE DISTURBANCE APPEARS TO HAVE INVOLVED DISGRUNTLED PEASANTS--WHOSE GRIEVANCES COULD BE POLITICAL, COCA-RELATED, OR BOTH--AND GOVERNMENT TROOPS CALLED IN TO KEEP ORDER. WE HAVE NO INDICATION THAT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN PROVOKED BY THE SILES' NATIONAL POLITICAL
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ORGANIZATION OR BY ARMED GUERRILLAS.
BOEKER

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NNN

Message Attributes

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